

# **Grantee Survey Summary**

## **Background:**

The National Science Foundation (NSF), Office of Budget, Finance, and Award Management (BFA), Division of Financial Management (DFM), Grantee Cash Management Section (GCMS) conducted an on-line Grantee survey from February 6, 2009 to March 20, 2009 (6 weeks).

The survey consisted of four sections:

- Institution Background,
- FastLane Cash Requests,
- Federal Financial Report (FFR), and
- Customer Service.

There were 392 respondents; a 23% participation rate return based on 1,700 grantees. A participation rate of around 25% is considered average. The majority of the responses came from Academic Institutions (61.5%) and Non-Profit Organizations (31.4%). The remaining 7.1% of responses included For Profit Organizations, School Districts, Foreign Awardees, Individual Awardees, and Tribal Organizations. 72.5% of the survey respondents had between 1 and 10 active awards. 17.5% had between 11 and 99 active awards. Nearly 10% had 100 or more active awards.

## **Significant Findings and Analysis:**

### **Payments**

82.4% of the respondents received their grant funds in their bank account within 1-3 days after submitting their cash requests through FastLane. 12% reported it took 3-4 days and 5.6% reported over 4 days.

97.4% stated that the processing time and current number of days required to deposit funds into their account did not pose a problem for their organization. However, 45.9% responded that the organization would benefit from a next day deposit into their bank account for requested funds. The most frequent sentiment expressed in the comments was that a one day deposit would improve their cash flow.

30.8% of the respondents noted that their organization would be interested in requesting cash on a grant-by-grant basis if the NSF technology and business processes supported direct data entry, an electronic data upload from their institution's financial system, and/or a spreadsheet upload feature to submit a grant by grant cash request. Although this is a low interest percentage, 79.8% did respond that their organization currently has the financial system capabilities to request cash on a grant-by-grant basis and 69.5% responded they have the human capital resources (personnel) to request cash on a grant-by-grant basis.

## **Federal Financial Reports**

26.7% of the respondents that reported using the FFR at the time of survey thought the FFR process was easier than old Federal Cash Transactions Report (FCTR) while 8.4% thought it was more difficult and 64.9% thought there was no significant change. At the time of the survey, 6.4% responded that their organization had not used the FFR for expenditure reporting, but most of that group commented that the reason was because they were new users. Since the time the survey was performed, all grantees have been required to convert to using the new FFR.

## **Outreach Visits**

10.4% of the respondents had been visited by a GCMS staff member in the past two years. 90.0% of those visited thought that it was helpful.

## **Customer Service**

36.7% of the respondents had contacted the GCMS via phone or e-mail over the last several months. Of that group 96.5% rated the interaction with the GCMS staff member as “Good to Excellent”, 1.4% thought the service was “Fair” and 2.1% thought the service was “Poor.”

Additional questions on customer service revealed the following:

- Customers’ satisfaction with the response they received from the GCMS staff member
  - 91.7% Satisfied
  - 6.9% not satisfied
  - 1.4% no response
- Customers thought the representative was courteous and professional
  - 94.4 % Agreed
  - 3.5% did not agree
  - 2.1% no response
- Customers thought the representative was knowledgeable about their issue
  - 93.8 % Agreed
  - 4.9% did not agree
  - 1.3% no response
- Customers responded that the representative resolved their issue
  - 93.8 % Agreed
  - 4.9% did not agree
  - 1.3% no response

Of the responses, 46.2% have used online help within FastLane and out of that group, 86.1% responded that it provided the information to resolve their issue.

## **Conclusions:**

Overall the responses were positive in that the majority of respondents were happy with the FastLane Financial Functions and the services provided by the GCMS. Strengths appear to be FastLane’s user friendliness, the responsiveness of the GCMS staff, and the general adaptability of the staff and systems to accommodate a diverse grantee population. Areas for improvement appeared to be:

- Timeliness of funds deposit (moving to next day deposit from 2-3 day deposits)
- Enhancement of the FFR (i.e. - quicker availability of the report, fixing defects, and improving availability of award information on the FFR)
- Some improvement in the overall knowledge and responsiveness of the GCMS staff when answering grantee inquiries.

A further area for study is changing NSF's method of disbursing grant funds to its grantees on a pooling basis, its current method, to disbursing funds on a grant-by-grant basis.

Several suggestions were submitted in the respondent comments. These included suggestions to develop the following system enhancements:

- A grantee payment history report or inquiry that would allow the user to designate a report/inquiry time period.
- Highlighting the FFR for awards with cancelling appropriations and for new awards.
- Improving on-line help and offering on-line training.

NSF is committed to respond in an effective and timely manner to the suggestions received from its grantee stakeholders. We are using the information received through this survey to develop plans to further enhance the FastLane system, the FFR, and on-line help processes. We've reviewed our customer service practices and made changes where necessary, initiated preliminary work on developing an improved grantee payment history report and are reviewing options to highlight new awards on the FFR.